

***NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INSTRUCTION 1-406
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***Administration and Management
Human Capital, NWSPD 1-4***

NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

NOTICE: This publication is available at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/directives/>.

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New Employee Orientation Program

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1. Introduction. This directive outlines procedures for operating the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) new employee orientation program. The NWS New Employee Orientation Program augments the NOAA new employee orientation which generally takes place on an employee's first day on duty. New employees may include individuals new to the NWS, transfers, contractors, and students.

2. Responsibilities. Responsibilities for the NWS new employee orientation program are as follows:

- a. Office/Regional Directors are responsible for ensuring that offices under their purview conduct orientation for their new employees.
- b. Supervisors are responsible for conducting general orientation for their new employees including monitoring their "buddy program" (see Appendix B).
- c. The Management and Organization Division of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer/Chief Administrative Officer (CFO3) is responsible for monitoring the program nationwide and for operation and maintenance of the new employee orientation Web site.

3. General Roles and Responsibilities. General roles and responsibilities are outlined in Appendix A.
4. Orientation Program. The NWS New Employee Orientation Program has three main components:
 - a. New Employee Orientation Program Web site
(http://www.nws.noaa.gov/employee_orientation)
 - b. Buddy program
(http://www.nws.noaa.gov/employee_orientation/buddy_program.htm)
 - c. Evaluation (http://www.nws.noaa.gov/employee_orientation/buddy_program.htm)
- 4.1 Web site. The New Employee Orientation Program Web site provides new NWS employees with a multitude of resources and information about NOAA's Weather Service. It is reviewed quarterly and updated on an as-needed basis. Employees are welcome to submit suggestions to the New Employee Orientation Program Webmaster (w-cfo.webmaster@noaa.gov) or CFO3 program manager (harriet.loeb@noaa.gov). .
- 4.2 Buddy Program. Each office is responsible for coordinating its own buddy program. (See Appendix B for information on the buddy program.)
- 4.3 Evaluation.

After six months on the job, new employees are asked to voluntarily complete a brief feedback form aimed at improving the Orientation and Buddy Program. This feedback form (see Appendix C) is available on the Orientation Web page and will not involve the issues discussed between the buddy and the new employee.

Completed forms are sent to FMC Directors so they can be responsive to employee needs. In June, at the anniversary of the New Employee Orientation Program, copies of all survey forms, with personal information removed, are sent to the NWS orientation program manager at nws.hq.orientation.program.manager@noaa.gov. The results are combined into a report used to improve the New Employee Orientation Program.

Appendix A

The NWS New Employee Orientation Program

The NWS has established a New Employee Orientation Program to help familiarize new employees with our organizational structure and operations. There are several components to the NWS New Employee Orientation Program. Each component is described below:

The NWS Buddy Program

A Buddy Program provides an opportunity for new employees to more quickly become adjusted to their office and organization. It is an essential element of the NWS Orientation Program. The buddy can help make the new employee feel welcome and comfortable at the new job site. During the first three months of the new employee's career at the NWS, the buddy is a point of contact for the new employee for general inquiries regarding day-to-day operational issues such as the location of facilities, information processing requirements, and relevant organization policies. However, buddies are not mentors and are not responsible for the personal or professional growth of an employee.

All Financial Management Centers (FMCs) are responsible for identifying buddies and matching them to new employees. The New Employee Orientation Home Page has a link to a buddy checklist to help the buddy provide assistance to the new employee.

The First Day at the NWS

The first day on the job, all new employees will be "officially" greeted by someone at their new work site, preferably the new employee's buddy. We want new employees to quickly feel welcome and acclimatized to the new environment. For example, individuals who have never before worked for the Federal Government will have much to learn. From day one, we hope to make this adjustment as easy and comfortable as possible.

In the regions and field, where orientation is different, new employees must still be greeted by someone located at the new work site. Again, this could be the new employee's buddy, the Regional Director, Meteorologist/Hydrologist in Charge, or another employee. However, at the work site, the new employees will meet their buddies as well as their direct supervisors. On the first day, the buddy should introduce the new employee to the New Employee Orientation Home Page. They should explain time and attendance, leave procedures, and other general office policies.

Every two weeks in Silver Spring, Maryland, NOAA conducts an orientation program for new employees. This program primarily focuses on the paperwork needed for new employees to start their career at NOAA. It includes briefings, and videotapes about NOAA and Employee Express. After this program ends, when new NWS employees arrive at their work site, it is

required they be greeted by someone in the new office. This person may be the new employee's "buddy," the Office Director, or another employee who will then introduce the new employee to his/her buddy.

New Employee Orientation Home Page

The New Employee Orientation Home Page guides new employees through links to information about the NWS and our operations. Materials ordinarily provided through an information packet are available on the home page. A welcome message from the Assistant Administrator is included as well as hyperlinks to numerous resources.

FMCs are encouraged to create their own "personalized" Web pages with local information. Since FMCs have their own home pages, they can add a localized orientation section and a link to the national New Employee Orientation Home Page. The home page is evolving and information will be added on an ongoing basis.

Monthly Program Office Briefings

Office directors at headquarters and the field have the option of presenting a briefing on the mission and goals of their own office. They may wish to do this on a monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly basis. This may be an excellent opportunity to warmly welcome the new employee to the FMC and to hold an informal reception introducing new employees to other staff. Materials specific to the office can be shared with the new employee.

Feedback

New employees can provide valuable feedback. A survey instrument is available on the New Employee Orientation Home Page. New employees can complete this form. Once a year, FMCs are to send the Management and Organization Division completed forms (CFO3), Office of the Chief Financial Officer/Chief Administrative Officer (CFO/CAO). CFO3 tallies the results of the survey form and prepares a report for submission to the CFO/CAO.

The new orientation program is comprehensive and evolving. It is expected it will be modified based on the feedback received. Additionally, offices can tailor certain portions of the program to meet their particular needs. For example, information about area restaurants, local Toastmasters, and evacuation plans will be different for the various locations. Our goal is to help new employees be effective and productive during their NWS career.

Appendix B

National Weather Service

**New Employee Orientation Program
The Buddy Program**

The National Weather Service (NWS) has implemented a Buddy Program as part of its New Employee Orientation Program to assist employees in the early months of their employment. The Buddy Program matches new employees with employees who have been with the NWS for some time to assist them in quickly acclimating to their office and the organization.

The Role of the Buddy

A “buddy” is someone who has worked at the NWS for two to three years and is willing to commit a period of three months to help new employees understand our organizational structure and operations; however, it is possible the buddy-employee relationship may phase out sooner than 3 months. By providing immediate access to operationally necessary information, a buddy accelerates the new employee's ability to deal with early confusing issues and become comfortable in the new work place. Questions about “normal protocol” in the organization, getting around the complex, finding the right people to go to for information, correct procedures, and learning what is “right” and “wrong” can easily be answered by a buddy. As a result, managers and supervisors should find that their interaction with new employees is less about low level, operational issues, and more about adding value to the organization.

Buddies will:

1. provide new employees with a point of contact for general inquiries regarding day-to-day matters such as the location of facilities, information processing requirements, and relevant organization policies; and
2. help new employees become comfortable in their new job by familiarizing them with the organizational structure and operations.

Buddies will be provided with a checklist of areas to cover during the new employee's first few days at the NWS office. This checklist can be found by clicking the “Buddy Program” button on the left of the [New Employee Orientation Home Page](#) . FMCs are encouraged to personalize the checklist with such information as eating areas, local Toastmasters, using voice mail, and office policies.

The Goals of the Buddy Program

By having a buddy, it is anticipated:

1. The new employee will feel more at home with the NWS in a shorter period of time;
2. Relatively straightforward queries regarding basic operational issues are dealt with in a timely manner;
3. The initial confusion and uncertainty faced by all new employees is lessened;
4. Other orientation activities such as classroom and on-the-job training can be related to actual workplace activities;
5. Our new employees have an opportunity to adjust in a supportive and risk-reduced environment;
6. Manager/supervisor time with new employees is freed up to deal with value-added issues;
7. The new employee begins to add value more quickly, leading to increased confidence and self-esteem; and
8. The buddy and new employee are more actively involved in making the NWS a better and more productive place to work.

Selection of a Buddy

Employees are selected by FMC senior management on the basis of two criteria:

- the employee's interpersonal skills, and
- his/her understanding of, and commitment to, the vision and values of the NWS.

It is suggested that, if possible, the selected buddy be a co-worker located in the same office or division as the new employee.

Responsibilities of a Buddy

Buddies will:

1. Make contact at the earliest available opportunity such as during lunch on the first day at the NWS;

2. Show new employees around the office, introduce them to their colleagues, and direct them to their work site;
3. Explain the operation of any equipment or systems they need to start their jobs;
4. Introduce new employees to the NWS Orientation Home Page;
5. Explain administrative office procedures and introduce them to their timekeepers, administrative, and other staff and procedures;
6. Explain how they can be contacted during the day and will be available to meet on a regular basis. At that time, non-urgent issues can be discussed;
7. Explain the difference between a buddy, mentor, and manager (see below); and
8. Ensure new employee feels comfortable asking buddy for future assistance and answers to upcoming questions within the next three months.

Difference Between a Buddy and a Mentor

A buddy is not a mentor, manager or coach.

1. A **mentoring program** seeks to assist individuals with their development, both personally and professionally;
2. A **buddy program** is solely involved with providing a one-point access to operationally necessary information. In essence, an individual's development is not an expected output.

The role of a buddy must be distinguished from the role of a manager or mentor. A mentor is someone, typically more experienced, who is involved with the all-around development of an individual in their organization on a professional and/or personal level. A supervisor/manager can be a buddy, but there must be some distinction between the roles.

A buddy is not asked to be the new employee's mentor. The buddy is not responsible for the growth or development of the individual, and it is not part of the role of a buddy to take on such a responsibility. The buddy will not be assessed on his/her success as a buddy by whether or not the new employee develops as an individual during the three-month period. Although the buddy role may involve explaining some simple job-related issues or straightforward procedures, it is not the buddy's job to replace formal training opportunities.

The buddy is not the new employee's manager or supervisor. The buddy will not be held responsible for the new employee's performance. Only the new employee's manager or

supervisor can resolve certain issues . Also, questions too detailed or specialized for a buddy to answer should be directed to the new employee's supervisor or manager.

Time Commitments for a Buddy

A buddy should aim to meet regularly for at last 30 minutes, once a week, during the new employee's first month and at least once a month thereafter. Meetings should be used to discuss any non-urgent issues the new employee may have. It is recommended that such regular meetings be held during lunch or in another informal setting.

During the first few days, it may be reasonable to expect as many as four or five brief queries a day. These should soon taper down to one or two a day. Although all new employees are different, after two to three months, the buddy may hear little or nothing from the new employee on a daily basis. By this time, the new employee may be more accustomed to the environment and the requirements of the job. If the buddy continues to get a large number of 'urgent' queries after the first month, then the Buddy Program is not working, and the buddy should speak to his/her supervisor. The buddy relationship can continue past a designated length of time if the new employee, the buddy, and their supervisor(s) are agreeable.

The buddy relationship between the buddy and the new employee will be terminated when:

- (a) three months expires, or
- (b) either party requests it.

The buddy relationship operates under a "no-fault" termination mechanism. This means if either the buddy or the new employee so requests, the buddy relationship immediately ends. If needed, they can speak with their respective supervisors. Reasons for termination of the buddy relationship will not be sought or proffered. No discussion will ensue. No blame will be apportioned.

Expectations of the Buddy Relationship

The buddy's relationship with the new employee should be open, positive, and supportive. Discussions between the buddy and the new employee should be confidential. It is not necessary for anyone else to know the details of discussions between the buddy and the new employee, and we are not involved in monitoring buddy relationships. We simply ask the buddy to be supportive of the NWS and co-workers. We discourage gossip and speculation within a buddy relationship, particularly as many new employees are not in a position to form an opinion on most issues during their early months at the NWS.

Review of the Buddy Relationship

After six months on the job, new employees are asked to voluntarily complete a brief feedback form aimed at improving the Orientation and Buddy Program. This feedback form is available on the Orientation Web page and will not involve the issues discussed between the buddy and the new employee.

Completed forms are sent to FMC Directors so they can be responsive to employee needs. In June, at the anniversary of the new employee orientation program, copies of all survey forms, with personal information removed, are sent to the NWS orientation program manager at nws.hq.orientation.program.manager@noaa.gov.

Appendix C

**Feedback on the
NWS New Employee Orientation Program**

I. When and where did you begin working at the NWS?

II. Did you participate in an orientation program?

☐ yes ☐ No

Was your orientation helpful?

☐ yes ☐ No

Please explain:

3. If any, what changes would you recommend to improve the orientation program?

4. Were you assigned a "Buddy"?

☐ yes ☐ No

Was your buddy helpful?

☐ yes ☐ No

Please explain:

5. Did you visit the New Employee Orientation Web site?

☐ yes ☐ No

Was the Web site helpful?

☐ yes ☐ No

Please explain:

VI. How would you improve the Web site?

VII. Other comments or suggestions?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please send your completed form to your FMC Director. If there are any questions, contact the orientation program manager at:

nws.hq.orientation.program.manager@noaa.gov